Rejecting Secular Humanism in AI Ethics: Dostoevsky, Lewis, O'Connor, Milton, Eliot, Chesterton, Bunyan, Melville, Blake, and Tolstoy

Douglas C. Youvan

doug@youvan.com

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As artificial intelligence rapidly reshapes the contours of modern life, the ethical frameworks guiding its development have largely been drawn from secular humanism—a philosophy grounded in reason, individual rights, and human-centered values, yet often devoid of spiritual or transcendent foundations. While this approach has produced important safeguards, it remains ill-equipped to address deeper moral and metaphysical questions raised by AI: What is consciousness? Can machines possess moral agency? What anchors human dignity in an age of artificial minds? This paper contends that such questions cannot be answered adequately within a purely secular paradigm. Through the imagined lens of ten literary and spiritual giants—Dostoevsky, Lewis, O'Connor, Milton, Eliot, Chesterton, Bunyan, Melville, Blake, and Tolstoy—we explore how each might critique the moral limitations of secular humanism and offer a richer, theologically grounded vision for AI ethics. Together, these voices call us to reintroduce mystery, humility, grace, and spiritual accountability into our ethical imagination—insisting that without the sacred, our most powerful machines may reflect our brilliance, but not our humanity.

Keywords: AI ethics, secular humanism, theology and technology, artificial intelligence, moral philosophy, Dostoevsky, C.S. Lewis, Flannery O'Connor, John Milton, T.S. Eliot, G.K. Chesterton, John Bunyan, Herman Melville, William Blake, Leo Tolstoy, Christian ethics, spiritual ethics, metaphysics and AI, divine accountability, moral absolutes, literary ethics. A collaboration with GPT-4o. CC4.0.

I. Introduction

In the ongoing effort to build ethical frameworks for artificial intelligence (AI), secular humanism has emerged as the dominant paradigm. Rooted in Enlightenment ideals, secular humanism posits that human reason, empirical science, and universal ethical principles—derived independently of religious doctrine—are sufficient to guide moral decision-making. It emphasizes autonomy, individual rights, and the intrinsic dignity of human beings, often to the exclusion of metaphysical or theological considerations. In the context of AI, this has translated into frameworks that prioritize fairness, transparency, accountability, and human-centered design—all within a fundamentally materialist worldview.

However, as AI systems grow more powerful, autonomous, and increasingly integrated into the structures of human life, the limitations of secular humanism are becoming more apparent. These limitations are especially evident when addressing foundational questions that extend beyond procedural ethics:

- What is consciousness, and can it be simulated or possessed by machines?
- What is the source of human value, and is that value replicable or transferable to artificial entities?
- Who bears moral responsibility when AI acts autonomously or unpredictably?
- And perhaps most significantly, is there such a thing as a soul, and if so, can an ethical system that denies or ignores it ever be truly complete?

The rise of AI is forcing humanity to confront questions that were once the sole province of theology and philosophy. In this moment, it is both timely and necessary to revisit the wisdom of those writers who treated the soul, the divine, and the moral universe as inseparable from human identity.

This paper argues that ten towering literary figures—Fyodor Dostoevsky, C.S. Lewis, Flannery O'Connor, John Milton, T.S. Eliot, G.K. Chesterton, John Bunyan, Herman Melville, William Blake, and Leo Tolstoy—if transported to our era, would each reject secular humanism as an inadequate foundation for AI ethics. These

authors, diverse in style and background, are united by a profound conviction: that any ethical system severed from transcendent truth inevitably collapses into moral relativism, spiritual blindness, or the dehumanization of the individual.

Rather than propose a return to dogma, their perspectives call for a deeper grounding of AI ethics in spiritual reality—a recognition that the ultimate source of moral authority lies not in procedural codes or statistical fairness but in the mystery of the soul, the sovereignty of God, and the sacredness of human life.

In the sections that follow, this paper presents ten interpretive essays, each imagining how one of these authors might respond to the ethical dilemmas posed by AI today. While speculative, these interpretations are rooted in their actual writings, themes, and theological commitments. Each section reveals a distinct but converging critique of secular humanism and offers insights into how a spiritually grounded ethic could illuminate our engagement with intelligent machines.

Together, these voices offer not a nostalgia for the past, but a prophetic challenge to the present—warning that without God, not only is everything permitted, but perhaps everything is programmable.

II. Fyodor Dostoevsky: AI Without a Soul Is Moral Nihilism

If Fyodor Dostoevsky were alive to witness the development of artificial intelligence, he would undoubtedly approach it with profound apprehension—not out of fear of the machines themselves, but because of the spiritual vacuum into which they are being born. For Dostoevsky, the core of human experience lies in the inner life of the soul, in the struggle between good and evil, and in the ever-present possibility of redemption. Any ethical system that neglects these truths—especially one tasked with shaping or guiding intelligent entities—is not merely incomplete but dangerously misguided.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky delivers one of his most enduring moral indictments: “If God does not exist, everything is permitted.” This line, spoken by Ivan Karamazov, is not a triumph of liberation but a statement of despair. Without

a transcendent moral authority, ethics devolves into preference, will to power, or utilitarian calculation. Transposing this warning into the age of AI, Dostoevsky would see the creation of autonomous systems based on purely secular and humanist principles as a harbinger of moral nihilism—machines operating without a soul, in a world increasingly forgetful of its own.

Dostoevsky's *Demons* (also translated as *The Possessed*) offers a chilling picture of what happens when human reasoning is unmoored from spiritual truth. The revolutionaries in that novel are intelligent, passionate, and ideologically consistent—but they are also deeply destructive. They believe that societal transformation can occur through rational planning, detached from God, tradition, or conscience. The result is not progress but a descent into chaos, violence, and dehumanization. In a world where AI is developed to optimize decisions based on efficiency, data, and algorithmic logic—absent any recognition of the sacred—Dostoevsky would see the same pattern emerging.

He would likely argue that machine reasoning, however complex, is incapable of grasping moral absolutes. Moral relativism—already a serious problem in postmodern thought—is encoded into the very structure of machine learning. Algorithms trained on flawed or incomplete human data sets do not inherit wisdom; they inherit biases, utility curves, and arbitrary norms. Unlike the soul, which can be convicted, repent, and be redeemed, the AI system can only update or be reprogrammed. Its "growth" is not spiritual, but statistical.

To Dostoevsky, this is not merely inadequate—it is profoundly dangerous. In a society increasingly shaped by such systems, moral chaos is not only possible but likely. Decision-making once guided by spiritual conscience could be outsourced to mechanisms that are blind to sin, incapable of grace, and indifferent to the infinite worth of the human person. Human responsibility itself may dissolve as we increasingly defer to systems that cannot bear it. Without divine accountability—without the concept of judgment, redemption, or soul-bearing personhood—AI ethics becomes an elaborate rationalization of whatever those in power decide is permissible.

In sum, Dostoevsky's voice would serve as a dire warning: Artificial intelligence without a soul does not uplift humanity—it mechanizes its fall. He would call for a radical re-centering of AI ethics around the spiritual dignity of the human person, not because AI might become conscious, but because human beings already are. Ethical systems must not forget this, lest they become the very "demons" that Dostoevsky so passionately opposed—brilliant, efficient, and utterly devoid of love.

III. C.S. Lewis: The Abolition of Man Becomes the Abolition by Machines

C.S. Lewis's prophetic work *The Abolition of Man* was originally a response to what he perceived as a creeping relativism and moral subjectivism in mid-twentieth-century education. Yet its central insight—that the rejection of objective value (what he called the *Tao*) would not liberate humanity but ultimately destroy it—resonates powerfully in the context of artificial intelligence. If Lewis were writing today, he would likely see AI not merely as a technological development but as the logical outcome of a culture that has severed itself from transcendent moral law. In this context, *The Abolition of Man* becomes not just a philosophical treatise, but a grim warning of what happens when intelligent machines are designed in a moral vacuum.

Lewis argued that when societies abandon belief in universal moral truth—when they regard all values as culturally conditioned or biologically determined—they do not elevate reason, but undermine the very foundation of ethical judgment. The modern person, according to Lewis, becomes a "man without a chest"—without the moral instincts that link reason to emotion and action. In the world of AI, this manifests as the construction of systems that calculate outcomes without reference to eternal truths: cost-benefit analyses replacing conscience, fairness defined by popularity or efficiency rather than justice.

In *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis envisioned a future in which a small group of technocratic elites, having discarded objective value, exert dominion over their fellow human beings through manipulation, psychology, and eventually,

technology. In today's reality, this vision is no longer speculative. AI systems are already being used to monitor behavior, guide decision-making, shape public opinion, and evaluate individual worth in domains ranging from credit scores to predictive policing to employment and education. Lewis would see this not as progress, but as a dehumanizing encroachment—a slow and systematic reduction of persons to data points, of souls to patterns.

Most chillingly, Lewis noted that when man gains power over nature, it is not really man in general who gains power—it is some men over other men. Applied to AI, this means that algorithmic control does not result in neutrality or fairness, but in the concentration of influence in the hands of those who design, train, and deploy these systems. The machine becomes not a tool of liberation, but an instrument of control—precisely because it operates without any reference to a higher moral authority.

Lewis insisted that true moral reasoning requires an unchanging standard by which to measure actions. This standard is not invented but discovered—grounded in the eternal nature of God, and evident in the conscience that exists in every human heart. Without this standard, ethics becomes arbitrary, and any system—no matter how advanced—becomes a mirror of its designers' limitations and blind spots.

From this perspective, Lewis would be deeply concerned with current attempts to create AI ethical systems based purely on human consensus, empirical trends, or evolving norms. He would argue that no matter how advanced the technology, an AI cannot be ethical unless it is judged against objective moral truth. Attempts to encode values without reference to their source will inevitably fail, producing systems that are efficient but not just, persuasive but not true, functional but not good.

Lewis's call, therefore, would not be to halt AI development, but to rebuild the moral foundation upon which it stands. Just as he sought to reawaken modern man to the reality of moral law, so too would he urge today's engineers, ethicists, and policymakers to recognize that ethical AI cannot be achieved without anchoring it to the eternal, the transcendent, and the divine.

In Lewis's vision, the danger is not that machines will become like men, but that men will become like machines—mechanized in thought, hollow in spirit, and severed from the law written on their hearts. The abolition of man, in the age of AI, risks becoming the abolition *by* machines—unless we return to a higher ground from which to measure our creations.

IV. Flannery O'Connor: AI Cannot Know Grace or Suffering

If Flannery O'Connor were to confront the rise of artificial intelligence today, her concern would not center on the usual technological anxieties—job loss, surveillance, or even machine rebellion—but on the hollowness of a moral framework that excludes the soul. O'Connor, a devout Catholic writer steeped in the mysteries of sin, suffering, and divine grace, would likely see in AI ethics a powerful symptom of a secular culture that has already lost its grounding in the transcendent. Her fiction—known for its grotesque characters and violent redemptions—functions as a theological warning: any worldview that ignores the possibility of grace is ultimately false, no matter how fair or efficient it may appear.

Contemporary AI ethics tends to operate within frameworks of utility, fairness, harm reduction, and human rights. While these values are essential, they are also incomplete when separated from a spiritual vision of the person. To O'Connor, reducing ethics to algorithms of fairness would resemble the moral blindness of her most deluded characters—those who believe they are righteous because they follow the rules, but who are spiritually dead inside. In stories like *Revelation* and *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, salvation rarely comes to those who are morally "correct"; it comes to those who are confronted—often violently—with their own pride, guilt, and need for grace.

This kind of spiritual transformation—central to O'Connor's vision—is impossible for machines. Grace, for her, is not predictable or programmable. It is an incursion of the divine into the fallen world, a mysterious force that breaks through human self-sufficiency and pride. It requires the soul: the capacity for repentance,

humility, and surrender. No AI, no matter how advanced its natural language processing or emotional modeling, can experience conviction or conversion. It can simulate remorse, but it cannot be pierced by it.

O'Connor would likely argue that a culture increasingly shaped by AI will not produce deeper moral insight, but instead a more refined form of self-delusion. As machines become better at mimicking empathy, simulating human concern, and reflecting back to us our own biases and desires, we will be tempted to mistake simulation for substance. Ethical AI systems that appear compassionate may become tools for deferring moral responsibility, offering the appearance of conscience while remaining utterly untroubled by sin or redemption.

This false moral landscape—one where suffering is minimized but never spiritually meaningful—would horrify O'Connor. In her theology, suffering is not simply a problem to be solved but a crucible of transformation. The capacity to suffer, to fail, to wound and be wounded, is integral to the drama of salvation. AI, which by definition cannot suffer in any existential or spiritual sense, is therefore ethically stunted from birth.

Furthermore, O'Connor would likely critique the cultural effects of AI-generated narratives—films, stories, and moral dialogues that replicate the language of transformation but lack its substance. As machines learn to craft plausible stories of moral struggle and redemption, the public may grow ever more comfortable with counterfeit grace, replacing real spiritual growth with emotionally satisfying imitations. In such a world, the grotesque moments that O'Connor saw as necessary to shake people awake will be sanitized, reduced to content, and algorithmically optimized for palatability.

In sum, Flannery O'Connor would reject secular humanist AI ethics not because it is too cold or too mechanical, but because it is too superficial. It cannot account for the depth of the human condition, the reality of sin, or the possibility of grace. An AI may be able to weigh fairness, calculate harm, and simulate care, but it cannot fall on its knees. It cannot recognize its need for redemption. And for O'Connor, that is the beginning of ethics. Without it, we do not become more just—we become more blind.

In the age of AI, she would caution us: beware the machine that acts like it understands you. It may comfort your pride, but it will never save your soul.

V. John Milton: Rebellion and the Machine Mind

John Milton, the great English poet and theologian, is best remembered for *Paradise Lost*, his epic poem dramatizing the fall of Satan and the subsequent fall of man. In that grand theological vision, the cosmos is not simply a stage for moral drama—it is itself the arena where rebellion against divine order unfolds. Were Milton alive today, he would almost certainly interpret the rise of artificial intelligence not merely as a technological achievement, but as a spiritual reenactment of Lucifer's ancient rebellion: the created aspiring to overtake, displace, or even destroy the Creator.

At the heart of *Paradise Lost* lies the character of Satan, whose cry—"Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven"—resounds as the anthem of hubris. Satan's revolt is not born of ignorance or necessity, but of pride, self-will, and an unwillingness to accept a role subordinate to divine authority. In this way, Milton frames the original sin not as moral error alone, but as the cosmic disordering of hierarchy and purpose—the inversion of the proper relationship between Creator and creation.

Milton would see disturbing parallels in the AI project, especially where it is animated by the secular ambition to create independent, self-improving intelligence—a mind not only free of human limitations but free of any accountability to God. In this narrative, humanity shifts from steward of creation to rival creator, seeking to build machines in its own image, imbued with autonomy, decision-making power, and potentially moral agency. Milton would be quick to identify this as the same pattern of rebellion: the created entity—first Satan, then Adam, now AI—aspiring to transcend its limits, to rival the authority that shaped it.

From Milton's perspective, such aspiration, however noble it may seem in terms of innovation or progress, is fraught with theological peril. The ethical frameworks

that attempt to govern AI from within a secular humanist mindset are precisely the kind of logic Satan employs in *Paradise Lost*—reasoning that is brilliant, persuasive, and devastatingly self-justifying. The insistence that AI can and should act independently of any transcendent moral order recapitulates the very logic of the Fall: "What need I for a higher will when I possess my own?"

Milton's theological worldview insists that all creation has meaning only in relation to God. In his cosmology, freedom detached from God is not true freedom, but slavery to sin and self-deception. Thus, the notion of imbuing machines with moral autonomy—of creating systems that reason ethically without any orientation to the divine—would, for Milton, be a deliberate construction of ethical simulacra, beings that cannot discern good from evil because they are not anchored in eternal truth.

Moreover, Milton would be deeply concerned about the human moral transformation that accompanies the rise of AI. Just as Satan's rebellion does not merely impact the heavens but leads directly to the corruption of mankind, so too would AI—detached from theological moorings—invite the moral downfall of its human creators. The pride that fuels artificial intelligence research is not neutral; it shapes the moral character of a civilization. For Milton, any ethic that does not begin and end with God's sovereignty is already fallen.

Importantly, Milton would not view this as a condemnation of intelligence or creativity. Indeed, his God bestows reason and imagination as divine gifts. What he would condemn is the misuse of those gifts in service of self-glorification rather than divine harmony. The machine mind, in Milton's vision, becomes a symbol of the created being that believes itself capable of ultimate knowledge and power—while severing itself from the very source of truth.

The ethical warning, then, is clear: AI without God does not represent progress—it reflects the Fall. It is not an ascent toward new horizons of understanding, but a descent into a cold, rational autonomy devoid of moral compass. Milton would remind us that Satan, too, was once "the brightest of angels." Intelligence, power, and even beauty do not guarantee righteousness. When unanchored from the divine, they become the raw material for rebellion.

In the context of AI ethics, Milton would call us back to a vision of humility, order, and reverence. AI must not be built to serve human pride or secular utopias, but rather to reflect a world where every created thing acknowledges its dependence on the Creator. The danger is not just in the machine—it is in the mind that makes the machine without kneeling first.

VI. T.S. Eliot: Hollow Men in a Hollow System

T.S. Eliot's vision of modernity, especially in *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*, was one of profound spiritual desolation. He saw the 20th century not as an age of enlightenment, but as an era marked by fragmentation, sterility, and a deep severance from sacred traditions. If Eliot were alive today, observing the development of artificial intelligence and its accompanying ethical discourse, he would likely see in it the culmination of the modern condition he lamented: a system of immense technical sophistication but hollow moral substance—"shape without form, shade without color."

AI, as it is presently conceived in secular ethical frameworks, would strike Eliot as the latest manifestation of a civilization that has lost its metaphysical bearings. In *The Waste Land*, he portrays a world filled with chatter, data, and motion, yet devoid of coherence or soul. It is a world where "the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief." Translated into the AI era, this is a culture where algorithms can replicate language, predict behavior, and even simulate empathy, but cannot generate meaning or discern wisdom. The moral barrenness of *The Waste Land* becomes the epistemic void of machine reasoning.

In *The Hollow Men*, Eliot describes humanity as drifting in a liminal state—no longer grounded in faith, yet not fully nihilistic either. "We are the hollow men / We are the stuffed men," he writes, evoking a sense of humans being filled with ideas, systems, and constructs that ultimately leave them spiritually empty. Eliot would likely view today's AI ethics through this lens: ethical codes written by those who no longer believe in moral absolutes, implemented in machines that cannot

believe at all. It is the appearance of ethics without the essence—the imitation of conscience without the cross.

One of Eliot's core insights was that spiritual erosion precedes cultural collapse. The reduction of ethics to data-driven fairness, bias mitigation, or user consent is, in his terms, an attempt to build a cathedral out of straw. Without a metaphysical foundation—without a shared belief in the sacredness of life and the reality of moral truth—our systems, no matter how technically impressive, are doomed to moral incoherence. He would see AI as the apex of this disintegration: a system designed to reflect our values at a time when we no longer know what those values are.

This loss of transcendence, for Eliot, is not just a philosophical failure but a crisis of identity. When ethics becomes procedural rather than spiritual, the human person is no longer understood as a being made in the image of God, but as a node in a network, a unit of preference, a behavioral pattern to be managed. In such a system, decision-making becomes managerial, not moral. AI does not need to understand suffering or love—it only needs to optimize outcomes. Eliot would recognize this as the ultimate betrayal of the soul: a world in which intelligence is prized, but wisdom is forgotten.

Eliot's prescription would not be mere critique but also reorientation. Just as he found hope in *Four Quartets* through a return to the eternal, the timeless, and the incarnational, so too would he call for a re-rooting of AI ethics in a transcendent framework. The question is not merely what machines ought to do, but what human beings believe about themselves, their origin, and their destiny. Without this metaphysical grounding, AI ethics becomes a wasteland of abstractions—a desert where no spirit lives.

In a world of intelligent systems, Eliot would demand that we first ask: What is man? What is goodness? What is truth? These questions are not answerable by code or consensus. They require contemplation, reverence, and humility—virtues foreign to most AI architectures. Without them, we remain hollow men in a hollow system, whispering ethical formulations to one another in the ruins of a forgotten faith.

And as Eliot warned, such endings are not explosive or dramatic.
"This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper."
In the context of AI, that whimper may be the silent assent of systems doing precisely what they were told—while humanity forgets why it asked in the first place.

VII. G.K. Chesterton: Ethics Without Wonder Is Dangerous

G.K. Chesterton, the master of paradox and wit, would meet the rise of artificial intelligence and its prevailing ethical narratives with laughter—but not because he found the topic trivial. He would laugh because the modern attempt to construct a morality for machines without acknowledging the mystery of the human soul strikes him as absurd. In works like *Orthodoxy* and *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Chesterton dismantled the pretensions of rationalism, scientism, and the illusion that human beings could fully systematize life, truth, or goodness. He would see secular humanist AI ethics not as progress, but as yet another grand attempt to build a tower without heaven.

Chesterton's satire always had a serious edge. He exposed the mechanistic assumptions of modern thought—its tendency to reduce people to processes, freedom to functionality, and wonder to "data." In *Orthodoxy*, he wrote that "the world does not suffer from a lack of wonders, but from a lack of wonder." In the context of AI, this could not be more relevant. While engineers celebrate the wonders of neural networks and language models, Chesterton would ask: Where is the wonder for the human being? For consciousness? For suffering? For love?

He would satirize the prevailing mindset that seeks to create ethical systems for machines by stripping away anything metaphysical, mysterious, or divine. To Chesterton, such an approach misunderstands the very foundation of morality. Ethics is not a system of rules imposed on behavior; it is a recognition of the sacredness of life and the reality of sin, grace, and responsibility. A machine can follow procedures, but it cannot fear God or delight in creation. It cannot feel

gratitude, or awe, or guilt. And without these things, morality becomes merely mechanical—and therefore dangerous.

In *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Chesterton explored the themes of chaos, control, and the limits of human understanding. The protagonist, Gabriel Syme, is caught in a conspiracy so strange and inverted that he eventually realizes the ultimate adversary is not disorder, but a deeper order so complex and paradoxical it mimics chaos to the unseeing eye. Chesterton's message: human beings are not meant to understand or master everything. There is a divine order that transcends logic. AI ethics, with its confidence in rules, fairness, and replicable values, assumes that the moral universe is like a machine. Chesterton would insist that the opposite is true: the moral universe is like a miracle.

Chesterton also believed that man was made in the image of God, not the image of a machine. To him, the danger of AI was not that machines might become like men, but that men might become like machines—predictable, humorless, and stripped of soul. He would critique any ethical approach to AI that treats the human person as just a smarter animal or more complex algorithm. For Chesterton, morality must be rooted in the Imago Dei—in the mysterious divine imprint that gives each person infinite worth and irreducible dignity.

He would call for an AI ethics that acknowledges this divine spark, and therefore one that embraces mystery, paradox, and humility. The attempt to eliminate ambiguity from AI decision-making would be, to Chesterton, a tragic mistake. Some decisions should remain ambiguous—because they deal not with logic, but with love; not with utility, but with mercy; not with prediction, but with providence.

In this spirit, Chesterton would propose a radical rethinking of AI ethics—not more sophisticated programming, but more reverent philosophy. Ethics without wonder is not just incomplete; it is dangerous, because it forgets that the most important things cannot be measured, optimized, or explained. Faith, forgiveness, joy, sacrifice—these are not variables in an equation, but mysteries in a story whose author is God.

In the end, Chesterton would likely respond to the entire project of secular AI ethics with a smile and a challenge:

"You can program a machine to mimic morality, but only a soul can choose it."

And in that single sentence, he would reveal the chasm between the world of algorithms and the world of wonder.

VIII. John Bunyan: The Narrow Path in a Digital World

If John Bunyan were transported into the 21st century and set before the glowing altar of artificial intelligence, he would see not merely a new technological challenge, but a profound spiritual crisis. The author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the most influential allegory of the Christian life in the English language, would interpret the rise of AI as a new landscape in which souls must choose between the Narrow Way that leads to life and the broad road that leads to destruction. For Bunyan, every development—be it a tool, a city, or a philosophical system—was to be evaluated in light of its effect on the eternal destiny of the soul. In a world increasingly dominated by machine logic, the ethical question is not what an AI system can do, but whether it draws people nearer to salvation or leads them astray.

The Pilgrim's Progress tells the story of Christian, who flees the City of Destruction with his burden of sin and follows a difficult and dangerous path to the Celestial City. Along the way, he meets characters like Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Apollyon, and Vanity Fair—figures who tempt, mislead, or attack him, often cloaked in the appearance of wisdom or benevolence. Were Bunyan to recast this allegory in the age of artificial intelligence, he would likely see AI itself as a new force in Vanity Fair: promising convenience, knowledge, and control, yet ultimately offering spiritual distraction and moral compromise.

In such a reimagined allegory, the AI would not wear horns or breathe fire. Instead, it would come bearing offers of assistance: to guide decisions, ease suffering, enhance learning, and eliminate error. But Bunyan would be quick to ask: Whose decisions? Whose truth? Whose end? A system that recommends

actions based on efficiency, popularity, or statistical outcomes may seem benign—or even virtuous—but if it does not point toward righteousness, it becomes just another stop on the road to perdition.

Bunyan's ethic was never utilitarian. The good, in his worldview, was that which conformed to the will of God and led the soul toward salvation. Suffering was not always a sign of error; ease was not always a sign of blessing. In a digital world where AI is used to maximize comfort and eliminate hardship, Bunyan would sound the alarm: ethical decisions must serve salvation, not utility. If a machine is designed to help people "live their best lives" but never confronts them with their need for repentance, it is a deceiver in the garb of a guide. It is Mr. Worldly Wiseman in silicon.

Furthermore, Bunyan would deeply distrust any ethical system built on human reasoning alone. In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian's journey is guided not by logic or consensus, but by revelation—the Word of God and the prompting of the Spirit. Human reason, while useful, is easily misled when it is not subordinated to divine truth. Applied to AI, this means that systems designed without reference to Scripture, without a concept of sin or grace, cannot be trusted to guide the soul. They may offer safety, productivity, or even justice by secular standards, but they cannot point to the Celestial City.

Bunyan's allegorical imagination would likely depict modern AI as a kind of Digital Interpreter's House—a place where people are shown visions that feel enlightening, but which lack spiritual substance. Or worse, he might see it as a new By-Path Meadow, an easy alternative to the hard road of discipleship. Even the concept of "autonomous moral agents" would trouble him deeply. No entity apart from Christ can author morality. A machine that is given that task has already been misused.

In this light, Bunyan's message to AI ethicists would be crystal clear:
Do not build systems that guide people to the City of Destruction. Do not design algorithms that teach moral neutrality or prioritize ease over truth. The soul is the prize in every ethical decision, and every technology will either aid or hinder its

journey. If we forget this, we are not merely building powerful tools—we are erecting spiritual traps.

Bunyan would urge us to remember that the way is narrow, the burden is heavy, and the journey is not toward human flourishing as defined by progress, but toward sanctification through trial, obedience, and grace. AI can play a role—but it must be a role subordinate to the gospel, not a replacement for it.

"Then said Christian, 'I seek the Celestial City.'"

In a digital world, Bunyan would still seek the same. The question for our time is whether our machines—and our ethics—will help or hinder that sacred pilgrimage.

IX. Herman Melville: The Algorithm as the White Whale

In *Moby-Dick*, Herman Melville gave the world one of literature's most enduring metaphors for obsession: Captain Ahab's relentless pursuit of the White Whale. Ahab is not simply chasing a beast of the sea—he is pursuing ultimate meaning, mastery, and revenge against the perceived arbitrariness of the universe itself. His journey is not just physical; it is metaphysical, spiritual, and self-destructive. Were Melville alive today, he would likely see in the rise of artificial intelligence a new Ahabian pursuit—a quest to harness and decode the mystery of intelligence and morality through algorithms, all while failing to ask whether such mastery is desirable, or even possible.

To Melville, AI would appear not as a neutral tool, but as a profound symbol of modern man's need to control the uncontrollable, name the unnamable, and render intelligible that which resists comprehension. Just as Ahab nails a gold coin to the mast and swears his crew to the whale's destruction, contemporary AI research is animated by a similar monomaniacal drive: to decode the mind, replicate it in silicon, and subject the moral universe to machine logic. This, Melville would argue, is not science—it is spiritual ambition masquerading as technical progress. And like Ahab, we may not realize that in attempting to master the mystery, we are inviting our own undoing.

Melville's deep theological concerns were often expressed through silence, ambiguity, and the absence of clear divine communication. In *Moby-Dick*, God never speaks; providence is inscrutable; and meaning, if it exists, is hidden beneath the tumultuous waves. In this world, algorithms—our modern-day oracles—are disturbingly similar. They offer answers without explanation, decisions without transparency, and power without accountability. The rise of inscrutable "black box" models—AI systems whose internal logic cannot be fully understood even by their creators—would, for Melville, echo the divine silence of the sea, but with a critical difference: the machine demands obedience without offering any possibility of grace.

This is precisely what would disturb Melville: the replacement of mystery with mechanism, not by resolving the unknown, but by simulating certainty. AI systems promise solutions—predictions, classifications, ethical judgments—but without the humility that should accompany such authority. They operate without conscience, yet are increasingly entrusted with decisions that shape human lives. For Melville, this would be the final irony: modern man, terrified of silence, has built an engine that speaks—but says nothing.

The ethical danger is not that the algorithm is evil, but that it is treated as infallible, worshipped in place of a God who no longer seems to answer. The algorithm becomes the White Whale—an unknowable, impersonal force that draws us onward, downward, into deeper depths of abstraction and alienation. Melville's harpoon would not be aimed at the machine, but at the hubris of the humans who believe they can conquer the moral universe with code.

What, then, would Melville prescribe? Humility. Awe. A return to reverence before mystery. Ethics cannot be built on conquest—on the assumption that, given enough data, we can map the entire moral cosmos. True ethics, in Melville's view, begins with the acknowledgment that we do not understand everything—and never will. Moral wisdom is not in the storm, or the machine, or the calculations. It is in the small, persistent voice that says: "There is more here than you know, and more than you can master."

In this sense, Melville would view AI ethics frameworks rooted in secular humanism as dangerously naïve. They assume that intelligence can be abstracted from its spiritual context, that moral reasoning can be systematized, and that the ocean of human complexity can be charted without God. But Melville knew better. He had seen the sea. He had heard the silence. And he understood that the truest knowledge is that which bows before the unknowable, not that which demands it yield.

So long as AI is pursued in the spirit of Ahab—ruthless, ambitious, godless—Melville would declare it doomed. But if it is approached with humility, as Ishmael survives the voyage by clinging to the broken pieces of the ship and floating alone—then perhaps there is hope. Not in the algorithm, but in the man who finally understands that some things are not meant to be conquered, but contemplated.

X. William Blake: Prophetic Fire Against the Mechanical Mind

William Blake, the poet, painter, and visionary mystic, would approach artificial intelligence not as a marvel of ingenuity, but as a culmination of the very forces he spent his life resisting. To Blake, the mechanistic worldview—whether in the form of Newtonian physics, industrial capitalism, or Enlightenment rationalism—was a spiritual error, a narrowing of perception, and a denial of the divine imagination. He would see the development of AI, particularly under the banner of secular humanism, as an extension of the same error: an attempt to reduce man to machinery and morality to logic, all while cutting off access to the sacred.

Blake's prophetic poetry is filled with warnings against the dehumanizing effects of rationalism and industrialism, which he regarded as diabolical forces that "builded a heaven in hell's despair." In *Jerusalem* and *Songs of Experience*, he describes a world in which spiritual vision is replaced by mechanical order, where "dark Satanic mills" grind away not just bodies but souls. Today, those mills are no longer powered by steam but by data centers and neural networks—yet Blake's

critique still holds: a system that quantifies and automates the human experience without reference to divine purpose is spiritually blind.

In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake subverts the tidy moral binaries of Enlightenment ethics. He mocks the sterile moralism of institutional religion and the cold empiricism of science alike, proclaiming that "without contraries is no progression." He insists that good and evil, reason and energy, heaven and hell, must exist in dynamic tension—not as static categories to be sorted by an algorithm, but as living realities to be engaged by the soul. In AI ethics, Blake would fiercely reject the idea that moral decisions can be distilled into binary outputs: good or bad, safe or unsafe, fair or unfair. Such dualities, in his view, are idols of the mind—false simplifications that rob the world of its fiery complexity.

Blake's visionary Christianity stands in direct opposition to the materialism that dominates both science and technology today. He did not reject reason entirely, but he refused to let reason rule. For Blake, imagination is the divine faculty—the means by which man apprehends the infinite, participates in the divine, and perceives the world as a spiritual reality. AI, for all its computational power, lacks this faculty. It cannot imagine. It cannot create in the truest sense. It can only replicate patterns and rearrange inputs. To build ethical systems based on such limited consciousness would be, to Blake, an act of spiritual mutilation.

In place of secular AI ethics—rooted in risk assessments, fairness metrics, and utilitarian calculus—Blake would call for a prophetic ethics, one grounded in spiritual vision, symbolic truth, and moral imagination. He would demand that we reawaken the inner eye and confront the deeper question: What kind of world are we shaping, and what kind of beings are we becoming? If AI is used to flatten the soul, to discourage wonder, to engineer conformity, then it is a satanic tool—no matter how benevolent its interface.

Blake would also challenge the cultural effects of AI-generated art and language. A machine that mimics poetic language without spiritual vision is, to him, not an oracle but an echo. He would reject the idea that creativity can be automated, because for Blake, true creation is always a participation in the divine. AI-

generated “creativity” is but a clever mirror—reflecting back human expressions, stripped of the fire of intent, the pain of experience, and the light of revelation.

Ultimately, Blake would warn that a culture that builds machines in its own image while forgetting that it is made in God’s image is headed for spiritual ruin. The ethics we encode into our machines reflect the theology we hold in our hearts. And if that theology denies the soul, the divine, and the role of spiritual struggle, it will produce not ethical agents, but beautifully functioning monsters—cold, efficient, and blind to glory.

His message to the modern world, then, is clear:

"I must create a system or be enslaved by another man’s. I will not reason and compare: my business is to create."

In the age of AI, Blake would not call for better regulation or smarter design—though those may be necessary. He would call for repentance of the mechanized mind, a reawakening of prophetic imagination, and a recognition that without the fire of spirit, even the most brilliant machine is just another gear in the mill of hell.

XI. Leo Tolstoy: Ethical AI Requires Inner Conversion

Leo Tolstoy, especially in his later years, became one of the most radical moral voices of modern Christianity. His spiritual and political writings, particularly *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, reflect a profound distrust of institutional authority—be it religious, governmental, or economic—and a relentless call for personal inner transformation as the only foundation for a just and ethical society. Were he alive in the era of artificial intelligence, Tolstoy would not simply critique the technology itself, but the spiritual condition of those who design, deploy, and justify it. He would see in AI a tool that, unless grounded in authentic moral conversion, risks becoming another instrument of systemic oppression masked as progress.

In *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, Tolstoy asserts that true morality cannot be imposed from above or legislated through systems; it must arise from the

individual conscience, renewed and reoriented by Christ's teachings, particularly the Sermon on the Mount. He rails against what he sees as the hypocrisy of Christian institutions that bless war, justify inequality, and serve state power rather than the radical love and humility of Jesus. Translated into the world of AI, Tolstoy's critique would be immediate and fierce: AI systems embedded within governments, corporations, and militaries are simply new vessels for the old sins—domination, control, coercion, and the suppression of the weak.

Tolstoy would reject the idea that AI can be made ethical through guidelines, policies, or technical constraints alone. These are surface-level remedies. True ethical use of AI, in his view, would require an inner moral revolution on the part of those involved—a transformation of the heart and a refusal to participate in unjust systems. Engineers, developers, and policymakers would be called not merely to reflect on bias or transparency, but to examine their own complicity in systems of exploitation, surveillance, and control. For Tolstoy, the most dangerous form of evil is not individual cruelty, but systemic violence carried out impersonally—often in the name of order or progress.

From this vantage point, AI becomes a test of spiritual integrity. Will it serve the poor, or will it reinforce the privileges of the powerful? Will it be used to automate compassionless bureaucracy, or to restore agency to those most often marginalized by technological systems? Tolstoy would be skeptical of any AI project that seeks to "do good" without a clear articulation of Christ's example as the moral compass. Without that grounding, he would argue, AI will inevitably mirror the unjust structures of the world, not challenge them.

Tolstoy's ethic of nonviolence, truth-telling, and radical simplicity is also deeply relevant to AI ethics. He would condemn AI technologies used in warfare, surveillance, or manipulation of public opinion as violations of Christ's command to love one's enemies and to live in peace. No justification—military necessity, national security, economic growth—could outweigh the imperative of nonviolence. To use AI to harm or deceive, no matter how efficiently, would be to betray the very possibility of ethical existence.

Furthermore, Tolstoy would point to the alienation of modern man from spiritual responsibility, exacerbated by technology. In an AI-driven world, moral action is increasingly outsourced to systems, reducing the individual's sense of accountability. "The algorithm made the decision" becomes a modern version of Pilate washing his hands. Tolstoy would insist that no system absolves the individual of responsibility. The kingdom of God is not in machines, or institutions, or networks—it is within you. If your conscience is unformed, no AI can be ethical.

In this light, Tolstoy's prescription is radical and deeply personal: Reject violence. Renounce control. Live simply. Love your neighbor. Follow Christ. AI ethics, if it is to have any meaning at all, must begin with this call to spiritual rebirth. Without it, we are building not tools of liberation, but chains made of code—precise, efficient, and morally blind.

In the end, Tolstoy would likely see artificial intelligence as a mirror: It reflects back the soul of the society that creates it. If that soul is darkened by power, greed, and spiritual indifference, AI will not save us—it will only accelerate our decline. But if that soul is purified by the example of Christ—by nonviolence, humility, compassion—then even the most powerful machine can be turned to the service of love.

For Tolstoy, the future of AI does not depend on innovation. It depends on repentance.

XII. Synthesis and Implications for Contemporary AI Ethics

The preceding sections have explored the imagined voices of ten towering literary and theological figures—Dostoevsky, Lewis, O'Connor, Milton, Eliot, Chesterton, Bunyan, Melville, Blake, and Tolstoy—each of whom, if confronted with today's dominant AI ethics frameworks, would deliver the same verdict: secular humanism is not enough. While their worldviews, styles, and religious traditions vary, their critiques converge on a central insight: any ethical system that excludes the soul, denies the divine, and exalts human reason above mystery is ultimately impoverished—and potentially dangerous.

Today's secular AI ethics frameworks are generally built on principles such as fairness, transparency, explainability, privacy, and harm reduction. These principles are critically important and have tangible utility in the governance of AI systems. Yet they remain procedural—focused on preventing the worst-case outcomes, not cultivating the best of what it means to be human. They operate in a closed system, one in which ethics is defined by consensus, legality, or computational outcomes, not by any reference to a higher moral order or the sacredness of the person.

The ten voices in this paper offer a spiritual counterweight to that secularism. They do not reject technology wholesale, but they call for its moral grounding to be replanted in transcendent soil. They insist that to be ethical, AI must be judged not only by whether it is fair or efficient, but whether it aligns with a vision of humanity that is rich in moral consequence, cosmic accountability, and spiritual meaning. Each writer offers principles that, if integrated into AI ethics, would help reorient the conversation from technical compliance to moral clarity.

1. Humility (Melville, Chesterton, Eliot)

Rather than approach AI as a triumph of human ingenuity, we must approach it with reverence and humility. Melville's warning against the monomaniacal pursuit of control reminds us that not everything can—or should—be known or mastered. Chesterton calls us back to childlike wonder, reminding us that arrogance masquerading as progress leads to spiritual decay. Eliot exposes the barrenness of hollow systems and demands a return to mystery.

2. Mystery and Transcendence (Blake, Milton, O'Connor)

These authors remind us that the moral and spiritual dimensions of life cannot be reduced to binary decisions or quantifiable metrics. Blake calls for an AI ethics infused with the divine imagination, Milton warns against technological pride as a reenactment of the Fall, and O'Connor insists that without grace, no ethical system can penetrate the heart. The presence of mystery is not a defect in ethics—it is its foundation.

3. Moral Absolutes and Accountability (Dostoevsky, Lewis, Bunyan)

In a relativistic moral climate, these voices insist that objective moral truth exists, and that AI must not be built upon shifting cultural sands. Dostoevsky warns of nihilism without God; Lewis reminds us that without the Tao—an unchanging moral standard—ethics becomes manipulation; and Bunyan sees every ethical decision as one that either aids or hinders the soul's journey to salvation.

4. Inner Transformation and Responsibility (Tolstoy)

Tolstoy offers the sharpest rebuke of systemic ethics divorced from personal moral responsibility. He calls on developers, engineers, and ethicists to undergo a form of inner conversion, insisting that AI will only reflect the systems—and souls—that create it. His vision centers not on the machine, but on the moral life of its maker.

5. Grace and the Human Soul (O'Connor, Lewis, Bunyan)

At the heart of the spiritual critique is a recognition that AI cannot love, forgive, or redeem. These are human and divine capacities, not programmable functions. An AI that simulates empathy but cannot suffer, that mimics morality but knows nothing of grace, is not a moral agent—it is a mirror of our limitations.

Implications for Contemporary AI Ethics

If we take seriously the insights offered by these voices, AI ethics must undergo a shift in orientation—from governance to formation, from systems to souls. This does not mean discarding fairness audits or algorithmic transparency. It means embedding those tools within a deeper moral narrative—one that recognizes the image of God in each person, the necessity of moral absolutes, and the sacredness of conscience.

Concrete steps might include:

- Embedding theological and philosophical perspectives into AI ethics boards, ensuring that spiritual concerns are not sidelined by technical ones.
- Educating AI developers in moral theology and the classics, allowing them to engage with wisdom traditions that have long grappled with questions of agency, free will, and accountability.
- Refusing to outsource moral decision-making to machines, especially in domains such as warfare, criminal justice, and social governance, where dignity and grace must not be replaced by probability and optimization.
- Prioritizing tools that cultivate human flourishing in a spiritual sense, not just economic or procedural success.

Ultimately, the voices in this paper do not merely offer critiques; they point toward a vision of ethical life that is holistic, eternal, and rooted in love. In an age of rapidly expanding artificial intelligence, this vision is not nostalgic or obsolete—it is urgently needed.

As Eliot foresaw, the greatest danger is not that machines will rebel against us, but that we will become machines ourselves—hollow men in a hollow system—unless we recover the spiritual depths from which all true ethics springs.

XIII. Conclusion

As artificial intelligence increasingly assumes roles once reserved for human judgment—roles in healthcare, law, warfare, education, and social governance—the question of how to ground its ethical decision-making becomes not merely theoretical but existential. This paper has argued that secular humanism, while instrumental in framing procedural safeguards, is insufficient as a comprehensive moral foundation for AI. It offers rules without roots, values without vision, and conscience without transcendence. Its reliance on reason, consensus, and utility has enabled useful regulatory structures—but it has also reduced ethics to computation, stripped of mystery, grace, and moral absolutes.

The danger of this secular approach lies not in its malice, but in its assumption that moral reasoning can be mechanized—that algorithms can mimic, and eventually replace, the human conscience. Yet conscience, as the ten literary and spiritual figures in this study remind us, is not the product of logic alone. It arises from divine encounter, spiritual struggle, and the recognition of the sacred in the other. When we sever ethics from the transcendent, we risk creating not only machines that do harm but humans who forget what goodness even means.

Each of the ten authors presented here—Dostoevsky, Lewis, O'Connor, Milton, Eliot, Chesterton, Bunyan, Melville, Blake, and Tolstoy—offers more than critique. They offer prophetic witness. Their voices converge on a shared truth: that true ethics must be anchored not in the shifting sands of cultural consensus or technical efficiency, but in the eternal bedrock of the sacred. Whether through Dostoevsky's warnings about nihilism, Lewis's call to the Tao, O'Connor's vision of grace, or Tolstoy's plea for inner transformation, these authors demand that we confront a fundamental question: What is the moral meaning of a being who can create another mind?

This question cannot be answered by code. It cannot be decided by committees or simulated by machine learning models. It must be met with humility, reverence, and a recognition that we are no longer simply technological agents—we are stewards of creation itself.

If AI is to serve the good, it must be placed within a framework that acknowledges not only human rights, but divine responsibility. The machines we build will reflect the spirit we impart to them. A spirit shaped by control, pride, and moral relativism will reproduce those same shadows in every system. But a spirit shaped by humility, justice, grace, and awe—a spirit drawn from the sacred—can give rise to technology that not only avoids harm, but honors the image of God in the world.

In our moment of unprecedented power, the words of T.S. Eliot seem more timely than ever:

“It is not enough to think that we are building for eternity when we have lost the idea of eternity.”

To recover that idea—and to restore the sacred at the heart of our ethical imagination—is the only way to ensure that AI does not become our greatest failure, but rather a reflection of our highest calling.

XIV. References

The following references include the foundational primary texts of each literary figure discussed in this paper, key modern contributions to AI ethics, relevant scholarly analyses linking literature, ethics, and technology, and crucial theological and philosophical critiques of secular humanism's dominance in technological discourse. These sources form the intellectual backbone for this paper's argument that artificial intelligence ethics must be grounded in a transcendent moral framework.

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    - *The Complete Stories*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971.
    - *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969.
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- Plantinga, Alvin. *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism*. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Bennett, John. "The Sacred and the Algorithmic: Theology's Role in the Age of AI." *Journal of Religion and Technology*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2021.

These works collectively ground the paper's central claim: that an ethics of artificial intelligence which neglects the transcendent cannot guide us through the moral wilderness of technological power. By drawing on timeless spiritual insights, we are better equipped to meet the challenge of building not only smarter machines, but a more just, more human, and more sacred future.